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WAR AGAINST
WAR

BY

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WAR AGAINST WAR

THE war in which we are now engaged has been called 'a war against war'. It is certain that most people in this country have not wished this war but have looked on it as a hateful necessity, and combine with a determination to see the war through a resolve to do all that can be done to prevent such a war recurring. We feel it an intolerable disgrace to Christendom that this thing should have happened. We recognize that for the general condition of Europe which made such a war possible we may, along with other nations, have been partly to blame, yet we hold that in the immediate situation we were guiltless and that it made most for the eventual peace of Europe that we should fight. In that sense we are making war against war, and we can endure all the suffering and horror which war involves if we can sustain ourselves with the hope that we shall make a recurrence of such things impossible for our children, that we shall once for all do away not only with actual wars like the present, but with the restless peace which preceded it, with the wasteful rivalry in armaments, with the uneasy searching after alliances and the balance of power.

It is well therefore that we should ask ourselves what ground we have for our hope, and how we can best realize it. For there are some who say that such a hope is an illusion ; that if we cherish the comfortable belief that

we are making war against war we are only refusing to face the facts; that our belief is based on hypocrisy and blindness. Let us therefore examine the arguments of those who hold that war against war is a delusive ideal.

Our critics are of two very different schools. There are those who hold that it is of no use trying to abolish war, for war between nations must always exist; there are others who believe that war is unnecessary and futile but that it cannot be abolished by war (that were to cast out Satan by Satan), but only by our all recognizing the horror and futility of war and refusing to fight. The first would probably approve the present war but laugh at our description of our ideal. The second would approve our ideal but condemn unsparingly the method we have taken to attain it. We must therefore ask ourselves whether or no there need necessarily be war between nations, and if there need not, whether war itself can ever be a weapon against war, can ever help to make war impossible, or at least improbable—if impossible it can never be made. These questions clearly concern the elementary principles which govern the relations of states to one another or the elements of international policy.

We need not deal with our two classes of critics separately. For if we examine the arguments of the first class, we shall probably find that we shall be compelled by the way to answer those of the second.

The supporters of the doctrine that wars are inevitable may be divided into those who hold that war is an evil, though one that cannot be avoided, and those who like General von Bernhardi and some writers and preachers in this country do not want to abolish war. Such persons as the latter must not be confused with those

who hold that in certain circumstances war is desirable. Most of us might agree to that but deplore the circumstances which called for war. General von Bernhardi thinks that it would be a catastrophe to mankind if war were abolished; he believes that the natural relations of nations to one another are enmity and competition, which, unlike the envy and competition of individuals, have no higher power to control them, and thinks that such enmity and competition are good in themselves.

The question whether war is in itself a good thing need hardly be discussed. It has plausibility only when war is identified with any kind of competition or struggle and justified on biological grounds. A moment's consideration will show that the growth of civilization and peace has not eliminated struggle and competition, but changed their nature. Progress consists largely in raising the terms on which competition is carried on, and the qualities in which men compete; and in the higher forms of competition co-operation plays a greater and greater part, and the success of one competitor means less and less the death or ruin of the other. We think it a good thing that there should be rivalry between German and French and English culture, and that the best should prevail, but we think that it ought to prevail because it is the best culture, not because those who have made it happen to be more ruthless in war or less scrupulous about treaties than are others.

Now though there may be much that is ignoble as well as much that is noble in the rivalry and competition of peace, no one would deny that the life of a modern nation at peace is better than it would be in a state of internecine strife. No one can disagree with Hobbes's famous description of a time of war where every man's hand is against his neighbour's:

‘In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain ; and consequently no culture of the earth ; no navigation nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea ; no commodious building ; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force ; no knowledge of the face of the earth ; no account of time ; no arts ; no letters ; no society ; and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death ; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.’

The most inspiring facts in modern war, the common devotion and patriotism of a whole nation, are possible only because that nation has been at peace with itself. If it fights to defend its culture, that culture is possible only through peace ; for in war, as Thucydides said, we lose that ‘margin of everyday life’ in which culture can flourish. There is no sense in defending war as a good thing in itself. Even General von Bernhardt does not desire war between the component parts of Germany. All Germans would agree that the united Germany of the end of the nineteenth century is preferable to Germany of the Thirty Years’ War.

Further, there can be no sense in saying that men *must* make war on each other, as though that were a fundamental element in their nature. For as we look back in history we can see how within the area now occupied by any of the great nations continual internecine strife has given place to settled and orderly government. It is true that we have not made civil war absolutely impossible. Orderly and constitutional government demands of a people a certain mutual forbearance and respect for mutual rights in which under stress of circumstances they may fail. Nevertheless no one would say that if we determined so to act that our children should never suffer the horrors of civil

war, we were following an illusory ideal. Rather we feel that, thanks to the political good sense of our ancestors, that ideal is already practically realized and we are the children who are benefiting by it.

If towns and districts which once lived in a state of war with one another can without giving up their local individuality, unite to form one nation under orderly and peaceable government, why cannot nations in turn give up war among themselves? Why should the relations between men of different nations be different from those between the men who now form one nation? These are the questions which those who disbelieve in the possibility of putting an end to war, have got to answer.

There are two kinds of answers given to such questions, based on very different considerations and very different conceptions of the state.

It is said sometimes that war is a relation between states and not between individuals, and that the relations between states are and must necessarily be different in kind from those existing between individuals; that the sole aim and duty of the state is and must be the acquisition of power. Within the state, the upholders of this doctrine would say, there ought to be justice and respect for law and indeed all the virtues. For only so are common life and culture possible. But the state is the supreme bond of social life. Beyond it there can be nothing. Security and culture having been given to the individual inside the state, each state is self-sufficing and has no need of law in its relations with its neighbours. The world is thus thought of as a collection of independent sovereign states, who acknowledge no common law and who are engaged in a constant struggle for power amongst themselves. The choice before every

nation is, in Bernhardi's words, 'world power or downfall'. Every nation must strive after power in order that it may impose its civilization and ideas upon the world. This ideal, when stated with Bernhardi's downrightness, is so repellent that it is difficult to have patience to answer it. It is an obvious abomination. Many of us have been familiar with it in the writings of German professors but have never imagined that any one could really believe that sort of stuff. The apparent obsession of the German mind with this astounding doctrine is a portent which we can only wonder at and deplore.

For look at the doctrine a little more closely. In the first place, this attempt to distinguish entirely between the relations between individuals and between states is obvious nonsense. The power of Germany over Alsace Lorraine or over Belgium means, if it means anything at all, that a certain number of human beings, Belgians or Alsatians, are forced to act in various ways against their inclinations at the commands of other individuals, not because they admire or respect these individuals but from fear of the consequences of disobedience. The will of Germany is decided by the wills of individual Germans. It is being exercised at this moment upon individual Belgians, with what results of suffering and anguish to the victims and of brutalization to the oppressors we are every day learning. The power of one nation over another which can be gained by war means this and nothing else than this, in whatever various forms it may be exercised. If we believe that it is not good for one man to have arbitrary power over others, if we believe that slavery is bad for the master as well as for the slave, we must believe it to be equally bad for one

nation to rule over another against its will. To adapt Lincoln's words: No nation is good enough to rule over another nation without that other's consent.

Further, the strength of a nation to exercise dominion over other nations is very limited. We sometimes think of a nation becoming a world-power by steady increase of the territory it possesses, and there seems no reason at first why such a process should not go on indefinitely. But a nation's strength depends upon the individuals who compose the nation, and their readiness to make all those efforts and sacrifices which the exercise of power demands. The number and readiness of such individuals is not increased simply by changes in the map. A nation cannot grow stronger by conquest if it has to hold down those it conquers. Conquest makes it stronger only if it puts those it conquers on some kind of level with itself and manages to inspire them with its ideals. The Prussian domination of Germany has apparently meant that most Germans have been inspired with Prussian ideals and united Germany is stronger than was Prussia alone. But then Prussia did not conquer Germany. The Prussian possession of Poland and of Alsace Lorraine has not had the same effect, and the efforts of Germany to hold down those provinces have not strengthened but weakened her. The self-governing dominions and India are a source of strength to the British Empire just because or in so far as they share and approve of England's political aims. If they did not so share, if we had tried to treat them merely as possessions which gave us strength to exercise our will on other nations as we pleased, the Empire would have been the source of fatal weakness that the Germans, arguing logically from profoundly mistaken premisses, imagined that it would be. The ideal of world-power is thus an impossible as well

as an evil ideal. That does not mean, as some writers imply, that there is therefore no need to resist it. It is impossible just because it must drive so many men to resist it; and an evil ideal may be unattainable in its completeness and yet may lead to endless suffering, misery, and wrong in its partial fulfilment.

So much for the doctrine that the sole aim of nations is power. But if we have disposed of that doctrine, we have not thereby shown that states are or ought to be governed in their relations to one another by the same principles of conduct as are individuals. Many persons who would not subscribe to Bernhardi's views still hold that ordinary moral obligations do not apply to nations. They hold either that the behaviour of nations is governed by mysterious forces, sometimes described as fate or destiny, or that it is the duty of nations to look after their own interests, and that when the interests of nations conflict there is bound to be war. Such persons would describe the conflict between Germany and England either as the result of both countries following their destiny, or as due to the fact that both Germany and England had to pursue their own interests; it was Germany's interest to expand, it was England's to stop that expansion, and hence war had to come.

Talk about national destiny is usually nonsense. It implies that nations have no intelligent control over their actions. It is commonly only a hypocritical way of excusing actions for which there is no decent excuse. It is true that the outcome of national actions depends upon the joint effect of a large number of factors, which cannot all be known to the statesman who commits the nation to action, and that therefore a statesman has much less power of anticipating accurately the outcome of actions than has a man who is acting for himself in

ordinary life. That, however, does not acquit him or the nation which follows him of responsibility for his deliberate actions: rather it increases that responsibility. Even Bismarck has borne witness to that. In a famous passage in his *Reminiscences* he dissents from what is known as the policy of a 'preventive war', the policy that a nation ought to make war at a time that is favourable to itself if it thinks that otherwise war will be made on it in the future. He opposed that policy 'in the conviction that even victorious wars cannot be justified unless they are forced upon one, and that we cannot see the cards of Providence far enough ahead to anticipate historical development according to one's own calculation'. If his successors had remained faithful to his teaching, we should not have had this war.

The second view that nations must follow their own interests is more plausible because it is the duty of *statesmen* to think primarily of the interests of their country, and it is from studying the actions of statesmen in international relations that we tend to form our opinion of the real nature of such relations. The truth is that the statesman, having power to commit the nation to action, is acting on behalf of or as a trustee of the nation. His line of action is therefore restricted. He has no right of himself to sacrifice his country's interests because he thinks it right to be generous. As a trustee his first duty is to his country. But statesmen are not the only persons in such a position. We are all familiar with the position of a trustee. We admire the man who sacrifices his own interests to others, we do not so admire the man who sacrifices to others the interests of his family or of those for whom he is trustee. That does not mean that a trustee has no moral obligations to other men. He has no right to assume that those for

whom he is acting are prepared to be generous : he must assume that they are prepared to be just. Further, the fact that we have some one acting in our name does not absolve us from the responsibility of seeing that his actions are right. On the contrary, it throws the responsibility on us.

The fallacy arises from the fact that we constantly think of men who are not acting collectively as nations, as though they were acting as isolated individuals. But men are very seldom in a position when they can so act. A nation is not a collection of isolated units. We are limited by all manner of ties, family, kinship, religion, nationality, citizenship ; and our duties to our fellow men are affected by the existence of these ties. Men have special duties to their family, to their fellow trade unionists, to their coreligionists, and inasmuch as the interests of these several associations may conflict, it is often hard for a man to know how to reconcile conflicting claims. Family loyalty, church loyalty, trade union loyalty seem often to set at enmity men who as individuals are really good friends. No one, however, really thinks that these different loyalties cannot be reconciled, or that because we can see no reconciliation between conflicting groups, therefore to one of the groups we have no duties. No one thinks that the best citizen is the man who has no loyalty to his family, his church, or his trade union. The possibility of conflict between these various claims is a problem for the statesman, but we do not think it an insurmountable problem. The relation of nations to one another is analogous to the relation of families to one another. Family loyalty may become a danger to the state if it means entire disregard of all other obligations, but it may and ought to be the bulwark of the state. And

state loyalty must be added to it, not substituted for it. Loyalty to our country may endanger international peace if it means disregard of all other nations. It need not do that, and we become 'Good Europeans' if we think of Europe not instead of but as well as our own country.

We may claim now to have answered the doctrine that states are quite different from individuals and are therefore not governed by moral obligations in their relations to one another, and that war is therefore a necessity. Let us now turn to a second line of argument.

This second argument is that peace, the decent observance of law and respect for mutual rights are possible within a state only because they are preserved by the force of the state. Law, according to this argument, can only exist when there is force to protect it. There can therefore be no such thing as international law, because there is no power supreme over the separate states which could compel observance of law. So long, then, as separate states exist, there can be nothing but enmity between them, and the only hope of universal peace is that one state should be powerful enough to compel all the others to obedience. We have lately been given two very good instances of this argument by German professors. *The Times* of September 11th contained a brief report of a lecture on the war delivered at Charlottenburg by Professor von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff. He is reported to have said that the present war showed how useless international law was without a superior power to enforce it, and that the only hope for the world was that Germany and Austria should win and *dictate peace and the observance of law to Europe*. Professor Ostwald, a famous German

scientist, has written to a friend in America a letter on the war in which he says :

‘According to the course of the war up to the present time’ (he was writing very early in September) ‘European peace seems to me nearer than ever before. We pacificists must only understand that unhappily the time was not yet sufficiently developed to establish peace by the peaceful way. If Germany, as everything now seems to make probable, is victorious in the struggle, not only with Russia and France, but attains the further end of destroying the source from which for two or three centuries all European strife has been nourished and intensified, namely the English policy of World Dominion, then will Germany, fortified on the one side by its military superiority, on the other side by the eminently peaceful sentiment of the greatest part of its people and especially of the German Emperor, dictate peace to the rest of Europe. I hope especially that the future treaty of peace will in the first place provide effectually that a European war such as the present can never again break out.’

‘These utterances are worth noting, for they are the views of two very eminent and fine Germans on how to make ‘war against war’. We on our side may perhaps have a dream similar save in our choice of the country which shall play the principal rôle. Such an ideal seems at first sight feasible. Did not Rome by force dictate peace to Europe? has not England dictated it to India? Why should not Germany or Great Britain dictate peace to Europe? All such dreams are vitiated by the most fruitful source of fallacy in international politics, the refusal to look at the situation from the point of view of other nations. Professor Ostwald at one and the same time thinks that England’s world dominion has been the source of all war, and that Germany’s world dominion would produce peace. The

elementary fact about the European situation is that there are a number of European nations who are more or less equal and, what is just as important, who think that they are.

If Europe can only be given peace by force, it can never be given peace, because no one state in Europe is strong enough to hold down the rest. Professor Wilamowitz-Moellendorff talks of Germany and Austria enforcing peace; we, if we are honest, talk of the *Allies*. That means that we assume that two or more independent nations can act together without being themselves held down by force. And if two or three are able to observe mutual obligations, why not a dozen? Even two nations can only hold together if they observe law and justice in their mutual relations. In the Roman Empire and in India one strong homogeneous state enforced peace on a number of smaller disunited states. That is possible. The conditions are entirely different when, as in modern Europe, the great nations are more or less equal.

And as we had occasion to notice before, no nation can ever permanently hold down another nation or nations by *force*. If its empire is to last, it must rest on the consent of those it governs. The British Empire is united now, and is able to use united force in this war, just because the nations which make it up have not been kept down by force. We are rejoicing in the support of the Empire in the very year that we learned, somewhat to our disappointment, that we had no power to enforce in South Africa our views of the proper treatment of labour leaders.

These obvious facts show that there is something wrong with the theory that law rests upon force. It may perhaps be worth while looking more closely at

the part played by force in the state. For if we understand what binds men together in a law-abiding society, we may see how states may be bound together to a common observance of law.

At first sight it looks as though law did obviously depend upon force. All states use force to compel the obedience to law, and the use of force is often looked upon as the peculiar characteristic of the state. No one, unless he be a theoretical anarchist, imagines that states and the ordered life they make possible could exist if they entirely refused to use force to compel obedience to law. This seems but a short step from saying that the state depends upon force, and that the setting up of an irresistible force is the necessary step to the making of a state. The opinion is widely held that force is at least the ultimate basis of the state. But whose is the force on which the state depends? It is not the Government's, for they are in a minority; nor even the force of what are called the forces of the administration, for their force depends on their having been organized and supported by the action and authority of other people. We all know that no government can enforce a law which its whole people is determined to break. If we then say that the force at the basis of the state is the force of the majority of its inhabitants, we must see that the majority has force to use only because it is prepared for concerted action. Force does not organize men who would otherwise be at enmity with one another. It is itself brought into being by organization, by the power and readiness of the people to act together to respect certain principles and to enforce certain laws. Force does not make government possible. On the contrary it is the mutual trust and sense of a common interest which makes possible the force which govern-

ment uses. At the same time it is important to notice that the use of force is necessary to a government. For although it is in the general interest that men should keep the law and respect their obligations to one another, occasions continually occur when an individual might profit by disregarding his obligations, and profit more just because other men kept their obligations to him. It is this conflict between the private interests of individuals and the general interests of the community which makes force necessary. Force seems to be the basis of the state because the state must be prepared to enforce the law on any member of the state who may violate it, but the state can only use its force because most of its citizens support its action and do not wish to violate its law: in other words, because most of them do not need to be controlled by force.

The argument then that international law can have no validity because there is no power above the different states to enforce it is invalid. For law does not depend upon force but upon respect for law. International law is of much narrower scope than state law and less effective, because there is yet little mutual trust and little power of common action between members of different states. Common political action is possible only between men who to some extent understand, respect, and trust one another. Such mutual trust and respect is of slow growth, especially between men who are organized in different groups, with different history and traditions and to some extent different ways of life. That is the real difference between the problem of political union in a nation and in Europe. The elements which go to make up a nation have behind them a long tradition of common understanding and of a sense of belonging together. The nations of Europe have behind

them a long tradition of enmity and jealousy. Some modern writers have thought that the enormous increase in economic relations between different nations which has marked the last two generations is of itself creating that mutual trust which will make war impossible. That is, I think, a vain hope. Economic relations give us an opportunity to understand and know each other better, but they also produce new sources of rivalry. For it is of the nature of economic relations that they can be entered into by men who are in spirit more rivals than co-operators, and who have no real purpose in common.

Are we then to wait for peace till in course of time we come fully to understand and respect all men? That were to wait for the millennium. If the state had waited for mutual understanding amongst all its members, it would have waited till law and the state itself was unnecessary. The sense of common interest and the respect of mutual rights at the basis of many states is weak enough, but an orderly society is secured in so far as that respect for rights is formulated in law and enforced by the organized force of the community. The common principles of action on which modern Europe has been able to agree are not very elaborate or far-reaching. They are none the less precious for that. The only way to make war impossible is at one and the same time to do all we can to increase common understanding between different nations, and to keep safe the position we have reached by the strengthening and enforcing of the public law of Europe, such as it is.

Modern Europe, with its distrustful rival nations, might not unjustly be compared to the Iceland of the Sagas. Iceland in the tenth century was a land of independent vikings, living each on his farm, owning no

political superior. They are proud, distrustful of one another, and intensely warlike. Yet they are kept from utter barbarism by their respect for law. The Iceland of the Sagas has an elaborate law with no State to enforce it. It depends entirely on public opinion, on a bad man's knowledge that if he breaks the law, not only his enemies but men with whom he had no quarrel will be against him. They will not let him marry into their families if he wants to, they will not help him if he gets into a difficulty, and if he shows more than usual disregard of the law they will combine to make an end of him, though they themselves may get no immediate profit from so doing. There is a famous passage in *Burnt Njal Saga* describing the coming of Christianity to Iceland and the dissensions that arose from the conflict of Christian and Pagan law. All Iceland came together to the Hill of Laws, and the speaker of the laws was asked his opinion. 'Thorgeir' (that was his name) 'lay all that day on the ground, and spread a cloak over his head, so that no man spoke with him; but the day after men went to the Hill of Laws and then Thorgeir bade them be silent and spoke thus: "It seems to me as though our matters were come to a deadlock, if we are not all to have one and the same law; for if there be a sundering of the laws, then there will be a sundering of the peace and we shall never be able to live in the land."'

If it was possible for the vikings of Iceland to submit to a common law though there was no power outside themselves to force them to do it, it should not be impossible for the nations of Europe. In no other way can we hope for lasting peace. For in this way alone we claim for ourselves nothing more than we allow to other nations. We have been told in the past that peace was best preserved by our being so strongly armed

that no one dare attack us. But because every nation acted on such advice, Europe became an armed camp where peace was almost as burdensome as war, and where the militarism was encouraged and fostered by which this war has been produced. We have also been told that we must preserve the balance of power in Europe. The doctrine of the balance of power implies that nations are natural rivals and enemies and make treaties with one another only for their own advantage. It is natural for a diplomacy which aims at the balance of power to regard treaties as having no real binding force. They are made purely in the self-interest of the nations who enter into them; when circumstances change and they no longer serve the interests of one of these nations, their whole basis and reason is gone. The balance of power too, when the powers balanced are ponderous and unwieldy and the equilibrium unstable, has a way of being upset by circumstances over which we have no control. This war has largely been brought about by Germany's efforts to correct the balance of power which the Balkan wars had disturbed to her disadvantage. Further, while all nations think they are trying to create a balance of power, they are really seeking an over-balance in their own favour. That they cannot possibly all get, and hence must arise rivalry and eventually war. Common respect for public law alone calls not for rivalry but for common action. The neutrality of the small states of Europe like Belgium was agreed to by the joint act of the Great Powers of Europe, not in the interests of this or that Power but in the interests of European peace. In fighting to defend that agreement, in fighting for the public law of Europe, we are fighting to give peace its only sure foundation. To this doctrine Mr. Asquith has recently

in his speech at Dublin given expression. I cannot end this paper better than by quoting his words :

‘I should like if I might for a moment, beyond this inquiry into causes and motives, to ask your attention and that of my fellow-countrymen to the end which in this war we ought to keep in view. Forty-four years ago, at the time of the war of 1870, Mr. Gladstone used these words. He said : “The greatest triumph of our time will be the enthronement of the idea of public right as the governing idea of European politics.” Nearly fifty years have passed. Little progress, it seems, has yet been made towards that good and beneficent change, but it seems to me to be now at this moment as good a definition as we can have of our European policy.

‘The idea of public right, what does it mean when translated into concrete terms? It means, first and foremost, the clearing of the ground by the definite repudiation of militarism as the governing factor in the relation of States and of the future moulding of the European world. It means, next, that room must be found and kept for the independent existence and the free development of the smaller nationalities, each for the life of history a corporate consciousness of its own. Belgium, Holland, and Switzerland, and Scandinavian countries, Greece and the Balkan States—they must be recognized as having exactly as good a title as their more powerful neighbours, more powerful in strength and in wealth—exactly as good a title to a place in the sun. And it means finally, or it ought to mean, perhaps by a slow and gradual process, the substitution for force, for the clashing of competing ambition, for groupings and alliances and a precarious equipoise, the substitution for all these things of a real European partnership based

on the recognition of equal right and established and enforced by a common will. A year ago that would have sounded like a Utopian idea. It is probably one that may not or will not be realized either to-day or to-morrow. If and when this war is decided in favour of the Allies it will at once come within the range, and before long within the grasp, of European statesmanship.'

III

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IV

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